

HOW DOES INTERETHNIC COEXISTENCE WORK?

*This policy handbook discusses the policy-relevant results of the JPI Urban Europe project “**Interethnic Coexistence in European Cities**” (ICEC). A more detailed documentation of the research approach, methodology and local results on Amsterdam, Stockholm and Vienna can be found in various publications available for download from www.icecproject.com*

There is not one specific mode of interethnic coexistence – neither in the same city nor in the same neighbourhood. This is one remarkable fact uncovered by the authors of this report during their intensive field research. Interethnic coexistence works in many different ways and is extremely diverse. In our interviews, coexistence, for example in Vienna, generated such polarised messages as “[...] *they have their own communities, where they meet and don’t want to have contact with us*”, but also this statement of an Austrian lady: “*With Turkish residents one gets a different kind of contact, as there is immediate understanding and openness [...]*”. The quality of coexistence and the quantity of interethnic interaction are as heterogeneous as the case study neighbourhoods and individuals with whom we spoke. Patterns of interethnic relations are clearly marked by the social and economic status of the neighbourhoods, but are also influenced to a lesser degree by the proportion of the migrant population and the ethnic mix.

The ICEC project compared **neighbourhood initiatives** in Amsterdam, Stockholm and Vienna and considers their effect on local interethnic coexistence and neighbourhood belonging. The study focused on three core questions:

1. Which local initiatives best support and strengthen the integrative power of urban neighbourhoods as places of living and identification for an ethnically diverse population?
2. How does participation in such local initiatives and the initiatives themselves impact the neighbourhood belonging of local residents?
3. What kinds of differences can be found between (non)participation in top-down and bottom-up initiatives?

This policy handbook draws predominantly on the comparative analysis of Amsterdam and Vienna and includes the perspective of planning practitioners in Stockholm. Both Amsterdam and Vienna face different challenges in terms of neighbourhood policy, which in turn influences the initiatives, their dynamics and outcomes. In Amsterdam, decentralisation and cuts to public services have resulted in appeals to active residents to develop their own initiatives. At the same time, concerns about the lack of (socio-cultural) integration of ethnic minorities demand that these initiatives are inclusive of all neighbourhood residents. In Vienna, integrating hard-to-reach communities and maintaining access to public spaces and green areas are important themes. This is linked to the increasing privatisation of these spaces due to population growth and the creation of new-build housing with privatised open spaces.

The **initiatives** in this handbook are designed to function as ‘**spaces of encounter**’ for neighbourhood residents: they provide activities that offer the opportunity for interethnic – and more generally intergroup – contact. Whether participation in these initiatives actually influences residents’ encounters with others and their perception of **neighbourhood belonging** is at the core of this cross-city comparative research. Due to our qualitative and ethnographic approach, we were able to gain in-depth knowledge of the initiatives and their effects. Our research design – in particular the ‘living lab’ approach (see Chapter 6) – allowed us to develop local networks which could form the basis for future cooperation.

We understand neighbourhood belonging to consist of three dimensions: **social embeddedness, place attachment, and co-responsibility**.¹ Our comparative analysis shows the general relevance of these three dimensions to residents’ lives in the neighbourhood, however their interpretation and perception of these concepts are very diverse. Based on the empirical findings in our living labs and theoretical discussions, we suggest that interethnic **coexistence** can be seen as the ‘**middle**’ of a **continuum**. We developed a graphic that highlights the fragility of coexistence (see figures 2 and 4 to 7). If peaceful coexistence – living side-by-side – is not maintained, conflicts and disconnection are potential outcomes. If, in contrast, coexistence is promoted and strengthened, this may result in increased neighbourhood belonging. Our analysis clearly indicates the importance of **investing in neighbourhood belonging from the side of policymakers and public stakeholders**. Peaceful coexistence is not simply a happy accident that occurs without effort. Rather, this stability – and a potential shift to the ‘right side of the seesaw’ – requires long-term commitment from policymakers, in particular the creation of a political and societal environment that **allows neighbourhood belonging to develop for all residents, and a community that is actively involved in its neighbourhood** and gives something back to and as co-responsible residents.

¹ For more details on the conceptual understanding, see: HOEKSTRA and DAHLVIK (2017); ICEC website: www.icecproject.com/project/theory

Reflections from Practitioners in Urban and Regional Planning in Stockholm:

Why neighbourhood belonging matters in regional and metropolitan development policy-making.

While the concepts of social embeddedness, place attachment, and co-responsibility naturally seem relevant for implementing local context policies in order to strengthen trust amongst citizens and improve liveability in neighbourhoods, it is less apparent to what extent they are crucial in a wider geographic context. Traditionally, the concept of social cohesion constitutes the basis for concerted action among stakeholders at the regional or metropolitan levels. The Regional Development Plan for the Stockholm Region (RUFS) is no exception. The current strategic policies for promoting social cohesion has a two-strand focus. The first strand focuses on the impact physical investments have on territorial cohesion by linking areas with different socio-economic structures to each other, urban design and landmarks, venues that attract citizens from various neighbourhoods, location of cultural institutions and sports facilities. The second strand focuses on individual empowerment and social capital, whereby social capital refers to trust in unknown people and in public authorities, social networks, safety and identity. Complementary to social cohesion, RUFS also promotes strategic policies aimed at mitigating barriers that prevent individuals reaching their potential in the labour market, employers' branding and diversity, attracting global talent.

In a regional setting, bridging between neighbourhoods is the key issue, rather than bonding within neighbourhoods. Empowering the individual or working with attitudes in general – in the labour market for instance – is likewise rather the key issue than addressing local context social structures and inter-ethnicity. These strands are likely to remain the key focus in the regional development work. However, over time in the Stockholm county, economic segregation has increased, the number of neighbourhoods with predominantly negative or positive socio-economic features have increased, and there is a tendency for new migrants to concentrate in a limited number of neighbourhoods. Hence, social change currently takes place at the neighbourhood level. This change has had regional consequences. Given the role of the regional level in development work for social cohesion – vision and ideas, learning and coordination, take-up and best practice, bringing together stakeholders and promoting quadruple helix constellations – it is not possible to ignore social change and interaction at the neighbourhood level. Horizontal and vertical cooperation requires interaction and an understanding of social phenomenon at the neighbourhood level.

